

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment

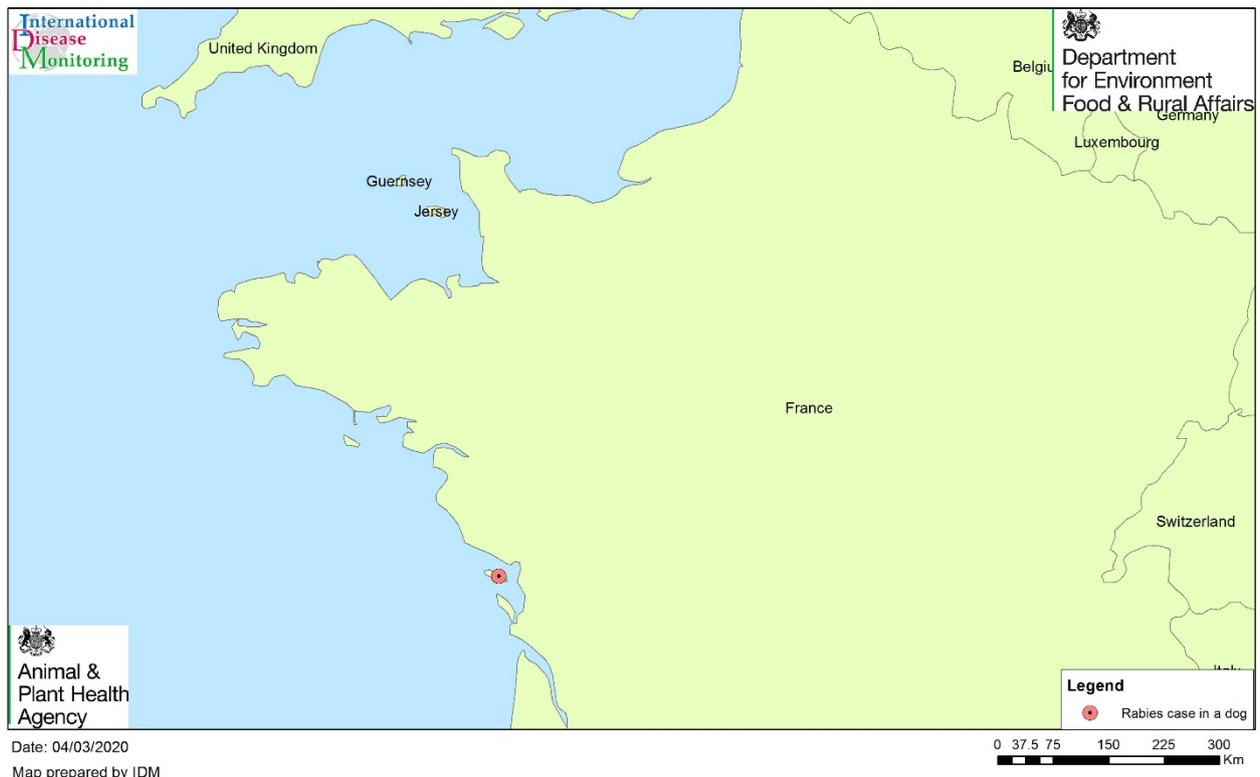
Rabies in an illegally imported dog in France

4 March 2020

Ref: VITT/1200 Rabies, France

Disease report

French Authorities reported a case of rabies in a young illegally imported dog, approximately 3 months old, on the Ile de Ré in the Charente-Maritime region on the west coast of France. The suspect case was presented to a private veterinarian in early February after showing sudden signs of aggression. The dog was euthanased at the request of the veterinary services for the diagnosis of rabies, and test results were confirmed as positive for rabies on 13 February, following PCR testing and virus isolation at the Institute Pasteur. The origin of the dog is unknown. The owner stated that he had travelled outside the national territory.



Rabies in France, February 2020

Situation assessment

The origin of the imported dog in France is not currently known, however it is known that the owner had recently travelled outside of national territory. Sequencing of the virus, carried out by the partial sequencing of the nucleoprotein and polymerase genes, showed that it is a lyssavirus of the rabies type Africa 1 virus. This virus does not circulate in France or Europe, but is widespread in northern Africa, with dogs as the primary host. According to the analysis of the partial sequence (800b) of the nucleoprotein gene, the most probable origin is Morocco, but further investigations are ongoing to confirm the exact area from which it originated.

France has been free of rabies in companion animals since 2001. The last reported case of rabies was in an illegally imported puppy from Algeria in 2015.

A restriction zone has been implemented to prevent movement of cats and dogs within Saint-Martin de Ré, all dogs must be kept on a leash or in cages, and an increased effort is being made to capture and vaccinate strays (Charente-Maritime State Services, 2020). Investigations are being carried out to identify humans and animals that may have come into contact with the dog on the Ile de Ré or during transport. Information collected so far indicates that contacts with the infected dog were very limited during the infectious period, but this needs further confirmation.

Morocco is an unlisted third country to the EU and as such, pets should be first identified by a microchip and then vaccinated (in that order) with blood testing at least 30 days following the date of vaccination at an EU approved laboratory. Finally it must undergo a three month wait in the country of origin before movement into the EU (Commission Regulation 576/2013/EU). Under these requirements the affected dog, which was three months old, would be considered an illegal import.

Conclusion

It should be emphasised that this outbreak in France concerns the case of an illegally imported pet which was too young to have been vaccinated prior to entry into France.

Vaccination is a protective measure which, when administered correctly, provides immunological protection against an animal being infected by rabies. However it cannot prevent rabies disease from developing if an animal is already infected and incubating disease. Although there remains a **very low** risk of introduction of rabies to the UK via legal imports or movement of wildlife as a result of this outbreak in France, this disease report emphasises how important it is to make sure pets are properly prepared for travel to the EU.

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References

All disease reports are available from the OIE WAHIS database.

State Services in Charente-Maritime Press release, La Rochelle 14 February 2020

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Der Nord Observatorul, 2020

https://observatorul.md/social/2019/12/16/65155_a-fost-inregistrat-un-caz-de-rabie-la-o-vaca



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